FIELD SIZE

The Kentucky Derby field has been limited to 20 starters since 1975 – the year after 23 horses contested the 100th anniversary of the Derby in 1974. At least 20 horses entered the race from 2004-19, and 20 of the last 23 years.

All told, there has been a field of 20 horses on 22 occasions (the first was in 1923 when 21 horses went to the post), and there has been at least 16 starters in 23 of the last 24 years.

Largest Field:	23	1974 (100th running)
Smallest Field:	3	1892 and 1905
Total Starters:	1,977	1875-2022
Avg. Field Size:	13.4	1875-2022
20 or More Fields:	22	
15 or More Fields:	70	
14 or Less Fields:	78	

Year	Field Size	Scratch	Entered
2022	20	2	22
2021	19	1	20
2020	15	3	18
2019	19	2	21
2018	20	1	21
2017	20	2	22
2016	20	2	22
2015	18	4	22
2014	19	2	21
2013	19	2	22
2012	20	1	21
2011	19	1	20 (22)
2010	20	0	20 (22)
2009	19	1	20
2008	20	0	20 (24)
2007	20	0	20 (22)
2006	20	0	20 (23)
2005	20	0	20
2004	18	2	20 (22)
2003	16	2	16
2002	18	2	20 (24)
2001	17	0	17
2000	19	1	20 (21)
1999	19	1	20 (21)
1998	15	0	15
1997	13	0	13
1996	19	1	20
1995	19	0	19
1994	14	1	15
1993	19	0	19
1992	18	1	19
1991	16	0	16
1990	15	1	16
1989	15	1	16
1988	17	0	17
1987	17	0	17
1986	16	0	16
1985	13	0	13
1984	20	0	20
1983	20	0	20
1982	19	1	20
1981	21	1	22
1980	13	0	13
1979	10	0	10
1978	11	0	11
1977	15	0	15
1976	9	0	9
1975	15	0	15
1974	23	0	23
1973	13	0	13
1972	16	0	16
1971	20	1	21
1970	17	1	18
1969	8	0	8
1968	14	0	14
1967	14	0	14
1966	15	1	16
1965	11	0	11
1964	12	0	12
1963	9	0	9
1962	15	3	18

Year	Field Size	Scratch	Entered
1961	15	0	15
1960	13	1	14
1959	17	1	18
1958	14	2	16
1957	9	1	10
1956	17	1	18
1955	10	0	10
1954	17	0	17
1953	11	1	12
1952	16	1	17
1951	20	3	23
1950	14	1	15
1949	14	0	14
1948	6	1	7
1947	13	1	14
1946	17	0	17
1945	16	0	16
1944	16	3	19
1943	10	2	12
1942	15	2	17
1941	11	0	11
1940	8	1	9
1939	8	2	10
1938	10	0	10
1937	20	0	20
1936	14	5	19
1935	18	4	22
1934	13	6	19
1933	13	9	22
1932	20	0	20
1931	12	3	15
1930	15	1	16
1929	21	5	26
1928	22	0	22
1927	15	0	15
1926	13	4	17
1925	20	5	25
1924	19	1	20
1923	21	3	24
1922	10	1	11
1921	12	3	15
1920	17	5	22
1919	12	2	14
1918	8	2	10
1917	15	3	18
1916	9	3	12
1915	16	3	19
1914	7	4	11
1913	8	4	12
1912	7	2	9
1911	7	3	10
1910	7	1	8
1909	10	3	13
1908	8	3	11
1907	6	2	8
1906	6	1	7
1905	3	2	5
1904	5	0	5
1903	6	0	6
1902	4	0	4
1901	5	0	5
1900	7	0	7
1899	5	0	5
1898	4	1	5
1897	6	0	6
1896	8	0	8
1895	4	1	5
1894	5	1	6
1893	6	0	6
1892	3	0	3
1891	4	0	4
1890	6	0	6
1889	8	0	8
1888	7	0	7
1887	7	0	7
1886	10	0	10
1885	10	0	10
1884	9	1	10
1883	7	0	7
1882	14	0	14

Year	Field Size	Scratch	Entered
1881	6	0	6
1880	5	0	5
1879	9	0	9
1878	9	0	9
1877	11	0	11
1876	11	0	11
1875	15	10	15

Average Field Size By Decade:

Decade	Starters	Years	Avg. Field
2020-22	54	3	18.0
2010-19	194	10	19.4
2000-09	187	10	18.7
1990-99	167	10	16.7
1980-89	171	10	17.1
1970-79	149	10	14.9
1960-69	126	10	12.6
1950-59	145	10	14.5
1940-49	126	10	12.6
1930-29	143	10	14.3
1920-29	170	10	17.0
1910-19	96	10	9.6
1900-09	60	10	6.0
1890-99	51	10	5.1
1880-89	83	10	8.3
1875-79	55	5	11.0

"Also Eligibles" Reinstituted in 2012

Churchill Downs reintroduced also-eligible entrants to the Kentucky Derby in 2012. Up to 24 horses may be entered in the race on Wednesday of Derby Week, including four horses that can remain eligible to compete beyond the official time of entry.

One or more of the "also eligible" horses could be allowed to run in their respective race if members of the original field scratch from the race prior to the official "scratch time" of 9 a.m. ET on Friday (Kentucky Oaks Day). That time is the opening of betting on the Kentucky Oaks Day racing program and the beginning of advance wagering on the Kentucky Derby.

In the event of a scratch or scratches from the race, preference among also-eligible entrants would be determined under the current eligibility system. Horses with the highest point totals in the "Road to the Kentucky Derby" races would "draw-in" to the field.

The same rules apply for the Kentucky Oaks, which has a maximum field size of 14.

"There has been significant discussion in recent years regarding also-eligible entrants for the Kentucky Derby and Oaks, especially in light of the late scratches of Derby favorites I Want Revenge in 2009 and Uncle Mo from [the 2011] running," said Kevin Flanery, president of Churchill Downs Racetrack. "Our concerns have always focused on preliminary wagering on the Kentucky Derby permitted during our Kentucky Oaks Day racing program, including refunds of wagers on scratched Derby horses and potential confusion during those two special days among our massive crowds of bettors.

"Also-eligible horses for Oaks will have nearly three days of opportunity to get into their race, while the Derby's window for also-eligible entrants to participate is just under 48 hours. We feel strongly that the deadline for also-eligible horses to join the Derby field must be set before preliminary wagering on the race begins. Despite the more limited window for also-eligible horses for the Derby, this system provides owners and trainers an opportunity to keep their Derby dreams alive that has never existed before."

An eight-horse also-eligible list was instituted in 1983-84, but advance wagering on the Kentucky Derby was negated because there would be lofty refunds after late scratches.

Although the 20-horse limit for the Kentucky Derby has been in existence since 1975, 21 horses were permitted to contest the 1981 Derby due to a legal issue.